

# Driving toward an algae-powered future

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by Richard Sayre

We can all thank algae for the air we breathe. These amazing — and amazingly prolific — photosynthetic microorganisms began pumping oxygen into Earth's atmosphere more than a billion years ago. In the process, algae absorbed carbon dioxide. That simple exchange enabled nearly all life on Earth.

Not bad for a group of species anchoring the base of the food chain. Incredibly diverse and abundant around the globe, algae photosynthesize about half the oxygen we breathe. They just need a watery home, sunshine, CO<sub>2</sub> and a few minerals to grow — rapidly.

Algae's appetite for CO<sub>2</sub> and their remarkable ability to produce oil might soon have us saying thanks again. A new research project led by Los Alamos National Laboratory seeks to drive algal biofuels to marketability, decreasing our nation's dependence on fossil fuels and putting the brakes on global warming.

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